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A Report from Local Church Study:

United Methodist Response to
Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry

Compiled by J. Warren Jacobs and Jeanne Audrey Powers

Three streams of response to BEM have been organized by the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns: 1) from the Section on Worship of the United Methodist Church; 2) from a GCCUIC created theological Task Force; 3) from a wide array of local churches, most all of whom were invited especially to engage in this study and submit their responses. This report, prepared by J. Warren Jacobs and Jeanne Audrey Powers, is a summary of these local church studies.

I. METHODOLOGY

A. SELECTION

Each annual conference chairperson was supplied with three copies of BEM, three copies of the "United Methodist Study Suggestions for BEM" (prepared for this study by CCUIC staff) and three copies of a brochure printed by the NCCC Commission on Faith and Order which described other denominational or World Council resources which could be ordered for use to accompany the study. They were asked to share these copies with the Conference chairpersons of the Commission on Worship and the Board of Ordained Ministry, since each of those units also has special interest in this topic. It was suggested that the Conference CUIC chairperson initiate consultation with the others in order to provide the names of three congregations in the conference who had agreed to engage in this study.

Since The United Methodist Book of Discipline explicitly charges the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns with the responsibility for responding to official ecumenical documents, the Conference chairperson of CUIC was seen as the primary initiator for this study at the conference level.

An identical copy of this mailing, with single enclosures, was sent to each Conference Council Director for their information.

A form was later mailed to each conference chairperson requesting that they submit the names and addresses of the churches to the General Commission. A direct mailing from the General Commission to those congregations provided them with materials to complete: an information form for collecting of information related to the

format of their particular study, and several sub-questions, based on the "four questions" found in the preface to the World Council of Churches BEM document, each to be answered with regard to eucharist, ministry and baptism. These four World Council questions to be addressed were:

1. The extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages.
2. The consequences your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogues with other churches, particularly those churches which also recognize the text as an expression of apostolic faith.
3. The guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical and spiritual life and witness.
4. The suggestions your church can make for the ongoing work of Faith and Order as it relates the material of this text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry to its long-range research project "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today".

Responses were to be made to the General Commission office by the end of February 1985 and this report summarizes those which were returned by that date.

B. RESPONSE FORMS

Forms listing the churches to be engaged in this study were returned by conference CUIC chairpersons from the following conferences (the number afterwards indicates the number of reports actually received):

West Virginia (3)	Western PA. (3)	Texas (1)
Minnesota (3)	North Indiana (1)	So. NJ (1)
West Ohio (2)	Mo. East (1)	Tenn. (0)
Pacific Northwest (2)	Memphis (1)	No. Ill. (1)
Troy (2)	Central Ill. (2)	Ala./West Fl. (0)
No. Carolina (2)	No. New Jersey (2)	No. Texas (2)
Wisconsin (1)	Detroit (0)	
Southwest Texas (1)		

Some interested individuals and some local congregations were eager enough to engage in this study even without invitation, and

additional responses were received representing the following annual conferences:

California/Nevada (1)	New York (1)	Dakotas area (1)
Oklahoma (1)	Nebraska (1)	Pacific SW (1)
Eastern Penn. (1)		S. New England (1)

Responses to this study were received from thirty nine groups, though some groups included representatives of several congregations. Twenty-eight congregations indicated they had been especially invited to engage in the study by the conference Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns Commission or its chairperson. The writers were somewhat surprised at what appeared to be little communication between the chairpersons of the three Conference agencies in the selection of the churches for response. It seems that expecting consultation and decision among them may not be an effective way to proceed in the future. Others had simply volunteered by hearing of the importance of local church input, had been contacted by other sources (such as a state council of churches or General Commission CUIIC staff). In one case, a district CUIIC chairperson initiated a consultation for district clergy and lay persons. We know of two bishops (Edward Bolton, Emerson Colaw) who initiated the study among their cabinet and program staff and one seminary which conducted the study as part of continuing education unit. One conference sponsored "enrichment course" was initiated and led by a layman who serves on the General Commission GCCUIC (Theodore Agnew). In the West Virginia annual conference, a concerted effort was made to invite three different kinds of churches. Some from whom we have not heard are doing the study during Lent and therefore were not able to be included in this report. Undoubtedly, there were far more of these studies being carried out than were reported to the General Commission.

C. ENLISTMENT

The decision to engage in the study represented a wide range of influences, besides the invitations that had been issued. Some had attended the WCC Assembly at Vancouver or had read about BEM in connection with Assembly reports. Others had been involved in Council or Conference of Churches' seminars or special events on BEM. Some had been introduced to it during their seminary studies, including the use of it in several courses, or in campus ministry programs. Only one response indicated that they had been made aware of it through conference Boards of Ministry and none mentioned conference Commissions on Worship. A surprising number indicated that they had read of it in United Methodist publications and others said they had been exposed to it "from numerous sources".

D. RESOURCES

With two exceptions, each of the study groups used the BEM Document itself, mostly along with accompanying resources. Those which did not, used the WCC Study Guide for BEM, written by Dr. William Lazareth for small group lay study (and which excerpted portions of BEM in its text) or the United Methodist "Study Suggestions". In both cases those were adult study classes, already in existence, each of whom took BEM as their study topic for six weeks. Nearly all the groups used the "UM Study Suggestions". Other resource materials represented were the UCC and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) BEM study guides, Friendship Press' previous Mission Study, On the Road to Unity by Marion Baker and Christian Unity: Matrix for Mission by Paul Crow, the World Council's Baptism and Eucharist: Ecumenical Convergences in Celebration, edited by Max Thurian, and Ecumenical Perspectives on BEM by Geoffrey Wainwright and Max Thurian (represented by four pastors who obviously are keeping up in their academic studies while in the parish), a BEM Study Guide by Dr. Dan Hendrick of Memphis Theological Seminary, the Austin Theological Seminary Review, In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting of the Consultation on Church Union, and several unpublished papers or tape recorded interviews on the topic. One congregation utilized the audio-visual packet "The Sacrament Series", developed by the Section on Worship on Baptism and Eucharist and available from Cokesbury. From the reports only two groups said they used the Bible extensively. Obviously, the length of the study affected the number of such resources used.

E. STUDY METHOD

The method of study varied considerably. Some used it as part of their adult church school class. Several pastors had a sermon series to kick off "the study". Almost all of the groups mentioned informal discussion as a major part of the study, though some began with a brief presentation or lecture. Others went immediately to the study guides or to the text itself. It seems apparent that all participants wanted to "get their teeth into" the issues which BEM raises.

Most groups indicated that their sessions lasted one to one and a half hours from 4 to 7 weeks, making a total of about six to eight hours spent in study of this document. One group spent an entire day on it and another group has held 11 meetings; another said "twelve hours and still going on"; one pastor indicated that 18 hours were spent on the study by the regular Bible study group. It seems as if those who engaged in the study have taken it very seriously.

Participants in the groups seemed to be somewhat substantial, also. A number of the local groups were from 15 to 30, though one six hour church school study included 62 people. These tended to be already established groups who undertook this study. However, among those

who organized a study group especially for this purpose, one organized a 10 week study session for sixteen people, and another held 18 meetings for eleven people. No group was under six, and of those reporting, the average was about 15. In most cases, a special invitation to the congregation provided the primary impetus for this study, and enthusiastic pastors enabled its energy.

Though we are not attempting to include in this report the results of hundreds of ecumenical events, conferences, consultations, seminars, and clergy study group which have occurred across the country on BEM, it is important to say something about those United Methodist local church studies in which persons from other denominations were participants. Many groups reported that their United Methodist group was made up of persons who had grown up in other denominations and had become United Methodist through marriage or with a geographical move. In some cases, spouses who had never become United Methodists also participated in the study (i.e. in one group of seven, only two were life-long United Methodists including the pastor; others were formerly Presbyterian, Baptist, charismatic, and one participant remains a Baptist but is active in the UM congregation with her husband, who was not involved in the study). Perspectives reflected in their report illustrate this background. In some of these "accidentally mixed" groups, it was apparent that the study was extremely helpful, since there has been little previous opportunity for them to talk specifically about theology or practices seemingly "strange" in other denominations, particularly in issues surrounding baptism.

Other groups, however, deliberately sought to include in their group persons from other denominations in their community. One study group was made up of 15 persons with three United Methodist congregations represented and seven non-United Methodists (by invitation): one Roman Catholic, three Lutherans, and three Disciples. The Disciples laity were involved in the study so that they could make a report to their own Council on Christian Unity as a part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) national response.

Another group which reported, (Rev. Robert E. Norman from Lancaster, PA) even though it had not been especially invited as part of the conference process, consisted of a total of 18 persons, including clergy and laypersons from the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist congregations. Both Presbyterian and United Methodist Study guides were used during this, their Lenten

study of 1984. At the conclusion of Lent they decided to continue in the fall on a monthly basis and to use as their text, Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry by Max Thurian; during this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, a portion of the Lima Liturgy was used for their community worship service.

The most extensive study process reported came from Roland W. Pugsley, chairperson of the BEM study group held jointly by the Shepherd of the Valley and Washington UMC congregations in Rhode Island. Mr. Pugsley, a layman in an insurance office, reported that he had developed both groups and sub-groups: one at each of the above mentioned UM congregations, another group consisting of the two Roman Catholics and himself, "meeting at our common place of employment, an insurance company" and what he termed "an advanced study group" consisting of members of the two United Methodist congregations who assessed the findings of the three sub-groups and who did further study on their own. He reported that the four groups and sub-groups held a total of 18 meetings, lasting from 1/2 to 1 and 1/2 hours a piece, plus "dozens of telephone calls by the chairperson to group members to clarify their comments". Two clergywomen, five lay women and four lay men contributed to the overall group, including United Methodists from the two congregations and the two Roman Catholics. Because Mr. Pugsley engaged extensively in the study group process for In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting, developed by the Consultation on Church Union, his report on BEM was the only one received which made careful and extensive comparisons of strengths and weaknesses of the two documents. His report was a carefully and thoughtfully constructed document of 18 pages, always reflecting perspectives of the group and both the conflicts and affirmations present in their study.

Another very significant report--and the most theologically prepared--described the extensive study process which occurred at University Park UMC in Dallas. Submitted by the chairperson of that congregation's Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, F. W. Fraley, III, a lawyer, it bears repeating in this summary as an example of the kind of thorough approach that is possible when a local chairperson takes an invitation for local church response seriously:

While our response was not officially presented to the church membership in church conference, we publicized BEM in our edition of the UM Reporter, offered three open lectures on BEM by distinguished theological figures under the auspices of our CUICⁿ commission in which we were joined by the Greater Dallas Community of Churches, taught the concepts

of BEM in four adult Sunday School classes, and evaluated the text in an expanded study group of our CUIC commission. Over four weekly sessions that group studied each key passage. The series of questions posed as personal preparation for study group members in Appendix A of "Study Suggestions of BEM for United Methodists" was used to elicit the response of study group members and was distributed to the Sunday School classes that had studied BEM. Our ordained ministers studied BEM and offered comments on the first draft of the response. The second draft of the response was presented to the study group before submittal to the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns.

One Oklahoma layman, Theodore Agnew, volunteered to provide "an enrichment course" for 36 people in three 90 minute sessions as part of a one-day Conference-sponsored Local Church Leaders Workshop. As a delegate to General Conference which had passed the resolution urging "local churches and other units at every level of the denomination to explore the incorporation of the theological convergence in BEM into its worship, education ethical, and spiritual life and witness" and to report same to the GCCUIC, Mr. Agnew simply assumed it was one of his responsibilities to introduce the study and to encourage response from local churches in his conference.

The Bracken UMC in San Antonio, Texas, in describing their appreciation for being invited by their conference CUIC chairperson to be one of the responding churches was "highly honored by this selection", indicating the members of the study group "entered into this task with a high sense of excitement and holy calling" and went on to state:

One factor working for us in entering into dialogue with the BEM documents is this: Dr. John Deschner's father was a pastor in the German Methodist Episcopal Church Conference which founded this congregation (20 miles away). The Deschner family is known and appreciated by the older persons in the congregation. So, the document came to us with the rather intimate sense of "ownership" rather than: "those people way out there that we don't know..."

One church (Vermont St. United Methodist Church, Quincy Illinois) approached "the faith of the Church through the ages" as a series of affirmations which were discussed at length. They stated, "In these discussions our group often felt like a small version of the Council of Nicea since we were trying to be theologically sound as well as flexible and diplomatic".

Reading these voluminous reports and accompanying letters always provide frequent "moving moments" when the heart and the spirit is touched. One such response came from a church who had not been officially invited to do so, but which group had read about it in newspapers and in New World Outlook. They wrote:

We are a group of women who meet regularly to study books of theology in Christ UMC in Lincoln, Nebraska. We have just finished studying "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry". I hesitate to fill out the questionnaires because we do not represent our congregation, only our little group. We are ten of us United Methodists, three UCC's and one of the Disciples of Christ. But we agreed we could accept practically everything in the beliefs presented, and would do so gladly to further unity". Signed: "Mrs. A. F. Deland, chairperson for CUIC commission at Christ Church and Secretary for the Monday morning Theology Group".

One has the feeling that the Church of Jesus of Christ is in good hands!

II. BEM and "the Faith of the Church Through the Ages"

Some of the reports tended to emphasize general summaries of their response to the questions; others sought to include personal statements from each member of the study group with a tabulation of the total. Therefore, in developing this summary of all the United Methodist reports submitted, the writers have chosen to divide the report into the three sections (baptism, eucharist, and ministry) to enable more faithfulness to the words and concerns of those local church persons who wished their voices to be heard.

However, a few summaries to some of the questions were stated in such a comprehensive way, that they bear repeating verbatim before moving into the more specific reflections from the local churches.

We believe that our church, and the United Methodist Church as we know it, can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages. It offers no contradictions with our understanding of the faith of the Church and affirms the continuity of the Church through the ages. The text has been carefully constructed, providing what we believe to be an accurate yet flexible view of the Church. We are appreciative of the fact that this document does not reduce articles of faith to a least common denominator, as it might have been easy to do, and that its ability to reflect more than one view of the Church builds a "tent" under which the Church may be united. Given the faith of the Church as expressed here, we believe that it will be possible, someday, to be united in belief while maintaining the diversity in practice that has developed over the centuries. Finally, we are of the opinion that this document is worthy of wider dissemination among local churches as a tool for teaching, study, and for the formation of faith communities (Centenary UMC, Mankato, MN).

Our study group found BEM to be entirely faithful to the historic tenets of Christian understanding and teaching. This was indicated by a trinitarian affirmation throughout the text; by the primacy given to the sacraments of baptism and eucharist as they determine the church's self-understanding and govern its liturgy; and by naming both sacraments and ministry as channels for a faithful response by the corporate church and its members (Chehalis UMC, Washington).

One congregation, while affirming this text in many appreciative ways, raised the issue of the lack of prior consensus on the "benchmark" of "the church through the ages". Aware of the tides of church history, controversy, and development, the question just what tradition and experience is relevant in establishing the model for "the church of the ages" and how reason balances and shapes them. They would therefore apply a Scripture standard with which to answer Question I, and do so in this fashion: using Acts 2:14-47 (particularly verses 42-47), they quote Max Thurian, who has written, "These verses epitomize the whole life of the church through the ages...We have here the model by which it will be able to measure this fidelity in the course of history. All periods of renewal in the church will be due to the return to these original springs". Taking Thurian's insistence that seven identifiable Biblical elements of the early church must be present*, they acknowledge that the celebration of the breaking of the bread, communion as brothers and sisters, and the unity of praising God and witnessing in the world are at the heart of BEM and add,

Through we would prefer a more inclusive concept of the church through the ages" that would recognize the contributions of the reformers through the ages, we are challenged by the stark comparison between the seven Scripture elements of Thurian's model church, together with the requirements of BEM, and our present day practice of the faith (University Park UMC, Dallas, TX).

III. BAPTISM

A. Question 1: The extent to which your Church can recognize in this text "the faith of the Church through the ages"

1. Ways that churches recognize the Church's faith in BEM

The sections of "Institution and Meaning of Baptism" (paragraphs 1-7) were viewed with much appreciation. "It is topically a thorough Biblical and theological treatise to a

*Footnote: 1) the hearing of the Word of God, 2) the celebration of the breaking of the bread, 3) the offering of prayers, 4) concern for communion as brothers and sisters, 5) the sharing of material blessings, 6) the unity of praising God and witnessing the world, and 7) the mission accomplished by the Lord who builds and the Church and increases it. (Thurian)

most controversial subject;...we cannot take serious exception with any of it, and would generally support it as presented" (Hennepin, UMC, Illinois).

Some leaders asked persons to identify the "Meaning of Baptism" (Section II) that most reflected their perspectives. While two congregations differed greatly in their theological perspectives (with geographical location certainly playing a part), it was interesting to note that a common thread ran through both. Shepherd of the Valley UMC in Scituate, Rhode Island indicated the none of the group thought that baptism was a necessary condition for salvation and could not affirm for themselves point B (conversion, pardoning, and cleansing) in baptism. Nearly all of their members believed baptism was "incorporation into the Body of Christ" (Point D). At the UMC in Hennepin, Illinois, however, members stated that while they agreed "in principle" with all five perspectives described in BEM, "we feel that the United Methodist Church, theologically, recognizes with emphasis only point D (incorporation) and to some degree point A and C (participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection and the Gift of Spirit). But point B, for us, seems to be the New Testament emphasis, if such can be claimed." It would undoubtedly cause dismay to the writers of the United Methodist newly approved "Service of Baptism, Confirmation and Renewal" that faithful United Methodists are unaware of or do not trust the crucial importance of each of these meaning of baptism in the UMC or its baptismal liturgy!

Almost all of the responses focused on Baptism and Faith (Section II) and therefore Baptismal Practice (Section IV). It is here that some major themes begin to suggest themselves that are considerably revealing of "the people called Methodists", though not necessarily of United Methodist official teaching.

Perhaps the most significant of these is the discussion this text created over the issue of infant baptism. Many expressed great appreciation for a deeper understanding of infant baptism. While most United Methodist were quite aware of what they "should" believe, the study forced them to acknowledge what they do believe. For example, from Whiting UMC in Indiana, "The study group found it easier -- in spite of our practice and tradition -- to affirm believer's baptism. The challenge (for us) is seeing God active in baptism as primary, and baptism as a sacrament of grace rather than a religious work". And from Red Hill UMC, Parkersburg, W. Va.: "Our people were pleased at the significance given to adult baptism and learned a great deal more respect for infant baptism. The baptism of infants remains a concern -- our people fear for misunderstanding of the rite as negating later Christian commitment."

Some persons, who have taken infant baptism for granted or who have had a latent, but unexpressed empathy toward believer's baptism found that this text enabled them to articulate their convictions. One group said that "BEM had

caused a more sympathetic look at believer's baptism" (First UMC, Dover, NJ), and another group stated, in fact, that if they took this text seriously, "There would be less infant baptism and more believer's baptism in United Methodist Churches" (First UMC, Pittsburgh, PA). An interesting aspect of the reports from the West Virginia Conference is that each of the three diverse congregations expressed a preference for believer's baptism as a result of their study.

While the majority of the group could appreciate the theology and practice of "infant baptism", a couple of young fathers yet held strong reservations, preferring to see it as a ceremony of dedication, having baptism refer only that which is done "when a person reaches the age of accountability". Common consensus was for baptism to be accompanied (by adults with an infant or an individual themselves) with "conviction of the heart" (Spencer Memorial UMC, Spencer, WV).

Our people have problems with infant baptism, growing out of the concern that infant baptism might be misunderstood as a sort of magical rite. We prefer adult baptism and were pleased to see adult baptism recognized as the normal procedure for baptism (Red Hill UMC, Parkersburg, WV).

Two former members of the Baptist Church said that the study showed them there was a substantial basis for infant baptism. Most of the group who were accustomed to infant baptism changed their views and realized that believer's baptism was really more acceptable" (Lewisburg UMC, West Virginia).

While one might rush to the text to determine whether believer's baptism really is indicated in BEM as "the normal procedure", it is worth noting that in the Lewisburg statement, BEM seems to be truly successful as a dialogical teaching text. One of the writers who participated in some of the drafting of BEM as a member of the WCC Faith and Order commission wonders, however, whether in the effort to be so inclusive of believer's baptism, the result may have upset the carefully crafted statement that intended to be "sufficient" for a variety of theological perspectives.

When one begins to reconsider the nature of believer's baptism, invariably questions are raised about both indiscriminate infant baptism and on the other hand, re-baptism of believers. Nearly all of the groups noted that baptism of infants must never be done indiscriminately..."All members deplored the practice of parents' not following through on the

commitments they made at their children's baptism" (Shepherd of the Valley UMC, Scituate, RI). "The text assists in speaking out against the abuses of commercialism (rosebuds and kisses) and cult abuse (absentee baptism by Mormons)". (Grace UMC, Dallas, Texas). Further implications which groups appreciated will be reflected in Question II regarding guidance which can be taken.

Because some groups recognized the "sameness" of action and occurrence in both infants' and believers' baptism, they could state, appreciatively, that they had "become more resolved not to affirm re-baptism" (O'Fallon/Williams Memorial UMC, O'Fallon, MO). Some accented that connection between infant and believer's baptism with words such as this: "We are in concurrence in recognizing one baptism -- wherever it falls in the faith pilgrimage" (First UMC, Delmar, NY). But for many groups the report was made in words such as this:

While there was general acceptance that baptism is an unrepeatable act, some felt that infant baptism is merely a dedication of the parents and the congregation and can mean nothing to the infant. In their view God's gift of baptism and the receiving love of the community should be balanced by opportunities for stronger personal commitment at the age of discretion" (University Park UMC, Dallas, TX).

For many local church folk, this was the first time they had engaged in thoughtful discussion on the sacraments. "I didn't know we didn't re-baptize"; "I don't see what difference it makes whether we do or not". Others suggested alternatives:

Two persons desired this approach: "christen" a child to indicate he/she "is in the family of God" and for a dedication of child/parents to family and religious duties; and "baptize" the person at a later age of reason and accountability (Bracken UMC, San Antonio, Texas).

The Vermont Street UMC in Quincy, Illinois stated "We affirm that baptism is an unrepeatable act" and quoted a participant: "Re-baptism is not so much an error of the individual as much as it is an error in church policy that insults the church of a person's first baptism".

Clearly even within United Methodism, though perhaps influenced by religious practices of dominant religious groups in those geographical areas, such as southern Baptists and Church of Christ members, different streams of ecumenical thought have been represented. The UMC "reception" process of either church doctrine or liturgical renewal has not been incorporated into all church practice and thinking. It may be

that by engaging in an ecumenical study more support is generated for a point of view that would not be considered a "United Methodist position" but is clearly present in the United Methodist Church!

2. Ways the statement might better express the Church's faith.

While affirming there was "nothing in the Baptism section which was outside of the faith of the church through the ages" (It was usually so stated in the negative), a number of concerns were expressed with regard to its limitations. They asked for more explication of certain aspects of that faith. One might say that they believed it to be "limited" in certain ways. Those concerns seemed to cluster in this fashion:

- a) "The part the Holy Spirit plays in the baptismal experiences is not clear or well rounded" (First UMC, Kane PA). The distinction between baptism by water and baptism by the Spirit is one which the text does not specifically address, but local church members hear the two frequently used. Since those referents are in the text (i.e. para. 14), there is confusion as to what the theologians mean. For example, further emphasis should be placed on water baptism being a sign of baptism by the Holy Spirit. Christians mutually recognize each other by seeing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which therefore confirms the adequacy of whatever water baptism was performed" (Epworth, UMC, Berkeley, CA).
- b) Frequent concern was expressed regarding the relationship of baptism to confirmation. This did not necessarily come from those who sought to perpetuate old terms, but from those who felt that the text and our own church needed to be clearer with regard to the relationship of baptism -- preparatory member -- confirmation -- membership training ("joining the church") -- and baptismal renewal. The convergence statements of BEM should provide some better assistance in this regard.
- c) In keeping with our Wesleyan heritage, several expressed the point that more needs to be said about rebirth and regeneration" (First UMC, Stamford, CT). Several connected this with the importance of "experience", seen as neglected in the Tradition so described. "This introduces the insights of psychology and faith development especially the adult transition to owned faith" (Emmanual UMC, Polo, IL). BEM neglects this whole stream of Tradition.
- d) Among some, there was uneasiness about the necessity of baptism. "The group wants to avoid the view-point that an un-baptized person is "not God's child" (Bracken UMC, San Antonio, TX). Another expressed it simply, "What happens to those not baptized?" (Hope UMC, Faribault, MN).

e) A strong request was made for a paragraph on the settings for baptism which are recognized in ecumenical conversation. The study group represented "baptism in creeks, tanks, the Jordan, pools, and sanctuaries. This diversity is probably shared in developing countries and could be noted in BEM" (Grace UMC, Dallas, Texas).

f) The meanings of baptism seemed to surface again when study groups frequently indicated that not enough emphasis was placed on "renewal of baptismal vows."

Some of our people feel a need for a re-commitment ceremony or a re-baptism after they have been away from the church for a time or at a time of a salvation experience. Baptism, in the minds of some, signifies "starting afresh." But since if baptism were necessary every time we fell and returned we would be baptizing people every Sunday, we need to clarify the distinctions between and the (relationship of baptism and eucharist) (Vermont St. UMC, Quincy, IL).

Perhaps that glimmer of light will lead to new insights into precisely what the eucharist is about!

As more denominations are responding to a pastoral need for renewal of baptismal vows, as more congregations are using them in educating their members on what baptism is and is not, and as pastors seek to avoid re-baptizing, the text could be strengthened by acknowledging the need for renewal of baptismal vows while at the same time providing a theological understanding of such renewals.

Though one person was concerned about the "multifaceted" meanings attributed to baptism, the question articulated precisely the point of this section: "How can a simple act mean all this?" (St. Paul UMC, Trenton, NJ).

B. Question 2: The consequences your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogues with other churches.

1. The effect on the denomination's thought and practice.

The most extensive answer to this question came from Mr. F. W. Fraley, III, local CUIC chairperson, University Park UMC in Dallas. They responded very specifically to how such a text would impel their congregation's growth in Christian unity with other congregations, and they marked out five, excerpted as follows:

1. Small, inter-denominational study groups would be formed in neighborhoods, emphasizing common needs and goals, de-emphasizing differences. BEM concepts would be included as common elements, even if not so labelled.
2. Dialogues with denominations less predominant in the area and with smaller congregations, especially the Disciples, Presbyterians, UCCs and the Lutherans. The Episcopalians, perhaps, on apostolic ministry and succession.
3. Ecumenical Worship Services. Our local CUIC commission has already been charged with developing ecumenical worship service in 1985. It would be easiest to invite neighboring congregations to our annual Ash Wednesday service at which worshippers have the option of having ashes imposed on their foreheads, praying at our communion rail, or remaining in their pews.
4. Issue-oriented ecumenism. Discussion of theology and joint worship experience may be more meaningful over the long term if we can jointly consider some social issues and community ministries in which we share with other congregations. One of these is health care needs, especially of the elderly, in our community. Better solutions might be reached by collective efforts.
5. Church Unity Discussions. We have emphasized that BEM is intended to promote greater visible Christian unity without any foreseeable objective of forming a larger, organized united church. Yet acceptance of BEM by various denominations as expressing the Apostolic Faith supports church unity efforts. We look forward to dual consideration of BEM and of the most recent COCU document, "In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting." Between our celebrations of the 200th anniversaries of the founding of the American Methodist Church in 1784 and the reorganization of American Anglicanism as the Episcopal Church in 1789, we Methodist and Episcopalians should reconsider the causes of our historic division with a view at least toward formal recognition and acceptance of our ministerial orders. Our different religious influences on the American frontier should be explored positively in light of BEM. This dialogue can help Methodism restore its sacramental dimension, which the Wesleys' teaching and practice never lacked.

Other responses listed specific consequences such as these:

"There would be a mutual recognition of the validity of everyone's baptism, regardless of method or denomination in which it was "offered" (Chehalis UMC, Washington).

It should open our eyes to the commonality of faith behind different practices, especially with regard to Roman Catholic Christians (Red Hill UMC, Parkersburg, WV).

"Greater seriousness would be given to baptism...There would be an abandonment of promiscuous infant baptism and infrequent re-baptism. There would be greater attention to life long discipline (Whiting UMC, Indiana).

Since the main barrier now seems to be from independent churches of the Baptist persuasion, we're not sure how this document helped in that case. But mutual recognition of baptism would strengthen the bonds between (other) churches (Long Beach, CA/District Consultation).

2. Relations with churches in the community.

The issue of transferring membership between churches with differing views of baptism remains a continuing one for some UM pastors, and BEM does not resolve that matter. Others found BEM assisting in church to church relationships:

If our congregation were to enter into a yoking, federation, or merger with another church, BEM would be an excellent theological base for the relationship (Chehalis UMC, Washington).

Other responses to this quotation will be described in the next section of this paper, since they more appropriately belong to the "practical consequences" portion of this report. However, perhaps Centenary UMC in Mankato, Minn. summarized it best when they wrote, "Our study of BEM provided an opportunity to reflect on those parts of the Church tradition that have been neglected or minimized within our local community, implying the need for similar reflection throughout the wider church".

C. Question 3: The guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness.

1. Ways the statement in Baptism has been challenging or provocative.

Most of the responses have been incorporated into this text in other places. However, a short recap would include comments such as this: "The study has exposed us to elements which will lead to more acceptance of the Baptism, Confirmation, and Renewal UM 1980 alternate text" (Trinity UMC, Durham, NC). "It has helped us understand why baptism must not be repeated" (First UMC, Lewisburg, WV). "It has allowed serious reflection on the issue of baptism, especially our Methodist heritage" (First UMC, Jacksonville, TX).

Obviously, the most provocative aspect lay in the wrestling which took place over the issues related to infant and believers' baptism. It could be said that those who had strong emotions about this came to better understand the position represented in the other point of view. Wherever this debate was hotly engaged in, appreciation was expressed that the United Methodist Church affirms both.

2. Changes in the local church (already made or expected)

- a. Education

This study has awakened for many persons the realization that little teaching, either from the pulpit or from church school classes, has taken place on the subject of baptism. Some pastors stated explicitly that the study has given them opportunity for theological teaching with an enthusiastic group of learners that they had not been able to carry out in other church education structures. For example,

This study helped us to talk about baptism-- which is very important to all of us, but something we had not ever done before (Hope UMC, Faribault, MN).

Furthermore, reports indicated that participants had not been aware of the "full and many meanings of baptism". "It is often perceived as a 'cute' event with an infant and unrelated to the life of the whole congregation... There must be a depth to our baptismal education (Centenary UMC, Mankato, MN).

But "depth", apparently, implies all aspects of education regarding baptism. "More teaching about baptism to both parents of infants and also adults who are baptized" included

recommendations for "more training in our "our sacramental heritage", with "more resources in the area of the catechumenate and confirmation being needed".

Some offered ways that Christian nurture, both before and after baptism, could be assumed.

There is a need to examine the responsibility and requirement of the congregation in accepting the participant into the Christian fellowship (St. Paul UMC, Cincinnati).

Younger adult Sunday School classes should periodically study baptism in order to prepare them for parental responsibilities (University Park UMC, Dallas).

A counselling/teaching program for parents of infants and children being brought for baptism should be developed in the church's life. It needs to be coupled with a program of supervision, oversight, and follow-up of families whose children have already been baptized (First UMC, Kane, PA).

The challenge is assimilating the baptized. (We are) requiring that with infants or adults at least two adult sponsors from within the congregation be chosen by the pastor or other leaders who together join in pre-baptismal assimilation tasks (Whiting UMC, Indiana).

b. Worship

Some reports recognized that nurture and education also takes place liturgically: "The 'depth experience' of baptism must also be realized liturgically, allowing for the richness of the symbolism to come through, particularly in the amount of water used" (Centenary UMC, Mankato, MN). "Worship is one way, and perhaps the best way, of teaching and transmitting the memories of the covenantal relationship God has established (Hennepin UMC, IL). A number described the "missed opportunity" when there is no sermon on the sacrament of baptism, when it takes place, even though sermons on the sacrament of holy communion seem to be more commonplace.

"We need to increase the joy and excitement of baptism" seemed to be a typical comment. "Recovering the 'mystery' element in baptism, introducing special Scripture reading into Baptism, relating the family more directly to Baptism, and renewing Baptismal vows" (University Park UMC, Dallas) all might be incorporated into the worship service for more effective experience of baptism.

One group suggested that a separate vow or liturgy was needed to unite the believer to a particular denomination or congregation, so that baptism would never be confused with anything other than uniting one to the Christian church. One church has had "priests and ministers of different traditions participating in baptism" as a way of making the same point (First UMC, Stamford, CT).

One response indicated that this study of baptism would provide a renewed understanding of the common faith present in interchurch marriages, and recommended that the congregation play a larger part in the baptismal rite so that there would be a stronger accent on the renewal of baptismal vows every time the sacrament is observed.

A number of the responses showed that they were either considering or had already implemented the admittance of baptized children into holy communion. "Since this study, our church has begun administering Holy Communion to all baptized person regardless of age" (Wesley UMC, Phillipsburg, NJ).

There was general consensus that baptized children, being incorporated into the Body of Christ, should be welcomed at the communion rail as early as they can understand that the act has special significance. No special ceremony of First Communion for children was deemed appropriate, though preparation for the Eucharist should begin in early years and the minister from time to time should specifically welcome them in his invitation to the Eucharist (University Park UMC, Dallas, TX).

Windover Hills UMC, Pittsburgh, suggested that some of the paragraphs (such as 1, 2, and 5) could be recited in worship as affirmations of faith.

c. Mission and Service

One transitional, urban congregation (Grace UMC, Dallas, TX) described itself as

"welcoming four other races into fellowship, with Sunday School available in English, Spanish, and Kymer; and a tri-lingual preschool, legal clinic, medical clinic, and sewing school in its weekday ministry...The Wednesday morning Bible study (made up of twelve to twenty grandparents who are the longtime faithful of the church) ..accepted BEM for study, and at its conclusion said that the study on baptism enabled them better to interpret baptism to the refugee community and be confident that we are speaking for a large section of the Christian world".

That seemed to be the most striking specific connection made by responders as to the connection between baptism and mission and service.

d. Ethical and Spiritual Life and Witness

This seemed a difficult question to respond to but several groups emphasized that a major difficulty is recognizing the relationship of the sacraments to each other, and understanding that both are preparation for the "sharing of the good News which is common to all". "Baptism is incorporation into the Body of Christ as the beginning of life-long growth into Christ and the responsibility to witness to the Gospel. The Eucharist is a reaffirmation of one's baptismal vows" (University Park UMC, Dallas).

Several churches believed that the relationship between baptism and confirmation was not adequate in the text, with one expressing the concern that baptism not "overshadow" confirmation. But on the other hand, that same church (Centenary UMC, Mankato, MN) wrote,

"But we have so overshadowed baptism that it has lost its meaning...that those who are baptized are already members of Christ's Holy Church. BEM provides an outline of the fullness of the tradition as regards baptism. We must make use of it in teaching and in worship; we can no longer 'muddle' through this important act."

D. Question 4: - Suggestions for Faith and Order

Most of these have been incorporated into the earlier section in which "limitations" of the statement has been addressed. Other suggestions are incorporated in the Conclusion section at the end of this paper.

IV. Eucharist

A. Question 1: The extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages.

Several churches saw that faith primarily in the image of the Eucharist as the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection and the life of the Church's members today. One church wrote:

We affirm that the eucharist is the memorial of the crucified and risen Christ and that our celebration of the eucharist is our collective testimony that the work of God goes on through us.

We affirm that the eucharist is a memorial, allows us to seek intercession with God by referring to a time in the past when God redeemed us and recognizing that His goodness continues into the present (Vermont Street, UMC, Quincy, IL).

Another powerful image was that of the Eucharist as "gift". The same church cited above also noted, "The first paragraph referring to the eucharist as the "gift which God makes to us in Christ through the Holy Spirit" and "This is a gift of salvation." (First UMC, Dover, NJ).

Several churches were impressed by the way the study of BEM helped recapture the meaning of "Thanksgiving" in Eucharist. In one church, where the reporter commented "Many of our people never saw communion when they were growing up in the church. Still, we are excited about the Lord's Supper as a point where we can come together", it is the vision of Eucharist that stands out: "We want to affirm the emphasis in the Eucharist on praise and thanks -- after all, the service is not a funeral" (Red Hill UMC, Parkersburg, WV). The church cited above in Illinois agreed, and connected the "Thanksgiving" with social action: "We affirm that the eucharist is a great thanksgiving to God and that we should show our thanks by seeking to create a more just, loving and peaceful world".

United Methodists in Rhode Island were quick to see the bond between gift, thanksgiving, and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist:

- (1) Eucharist is a joyous kind of thing: Christ's presence.
- (2) I have a growing awareness of the presence of Christ during the Eucharist; I used to think of Eucharist just as a memorial. I draw on this image (of the presence of Christ during the Eucharist) during times of trouble" (Shepherd of the Valley, Scituate, R.I., Washington UMC, Coventry, R.I.).

Other ways that churches expressed their experience of Christ's presence in the Eucharist were:

Christ is with us in the Eucharist. In the eucharist we are one with Christ and one with each other (Hope UMC, Faribault, MN).

We recognize the real presence of Christ in a spiritual sense in the sacrament. We recognize the sacrament as a rite for confession and rededication" (Lewisburg UMC, Lewisburg, W.Va).

Other themes that also appear are historic continuity (Grace UMC, Dallas, Texas; O'Fallon/Williams Memorial, MO) and the role of apostolic tradition (First UMC, Jacksonville, TX) the unity of word and table, and "The Biblical Command by Christ...the communion in a special way with God and all Christians" (St. Andrew UMC, Memphis, TN).

A couple of churches saw a connection between the BEM text on the Eucharist with "renewed eucharistic prayer texts" (Whiting UMC, Indiana) or with the 1972 Alternate Service, particularly in the use of trinitarian language. One church affirmed of the Eucharist after its study: "It is the common practice of faith that should united all Christians. It is important to reconciliation, forgiveness, new life" (First UMC, Burlington, VT). And another demanded even more clarity on the issue of Eucharist and reconciliation:

We affirm that the eucharist celebrates the coming together of people within the body of Christ and that eucharist demands that we act in the spirit of reconciliation and sharing with all our brothers and sisters. We affirm that we are already reconciled with our brothers and sisters as a gift from God and we are called to recognize and act on that reality. (While we were asked not to edit the BEM document, we want to state our disagreement with the second sentence of section 20 and page 23. We disagree with the phrase, "Those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God" and would have it as "our brothers and sister in the one family of God" (Vermont Street, UMC, Quincy, IL).

2. Ways the statement might better express the Church's faith.

But making "faith claims" regarding Eucharist still leaves a great deal of room for difference -- both in appreciating or estimating the value of Eucharist for the individual Christian and the local church and also in defining what happens in the Eucharist.

Paragraph 13, on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, was problematic for several churches who called for clarity on this issue. One church said this paragraph was the "least clear and most troublesome", and offered the judgment that this may "point to how non-sacramental we have been".

Another church said, "Paragraph 13 presented the most problems for acceptance" (Grace UMC, Dallas, TX). Since some churches (noted above) warmed to the concept of Christ's presence in the Eucharist and others had difficulty, we might need to look closely at the way some churches spoke of the "elements". For example, one reporter said of his group "They believed Jesus as being present at the eucharist, and not as the elements really becoming part of Jesus" (Lewisburg UMC, Lewisburg, WV).

Churches also expressed a need for clarity regarding open communion. One thought the WCC needed to be pushed toward open communion; another said it was happy to join the WCC and its stand on open communion (Red Hill UMC, Parkersburg, WV). The role of children at Eucharist was not clear in BEM for several respondents, and opinion seemed to be divided regarding the appropriateness of children communing. One group quoted a member of its study team as saying "We unite with Jesus and with each other in the Body of Christ" and another who "during communion, feels communion with the great mass of Christians, past and present, feels part of an enormous thing". This church, with its emphasis on the "Communion of the Faithful", had strong feelings about the presence of children at the Eucharist:

One deficiency in BEM is that there is no strong support for open communion for children. This is an important matter; there are benefits for children participating in communion: a shared family celebration (Shepherd of the Valley, Scituate, RI; Washington UMC, Covently, RI).

One church related a touching story that is to the point:

Some persons wondered if children should take the bread and wine. One mother had forbidden her little daughter to take any. After the service she told her child it was for those who love Jesus. The child then replied, "But I love Jesus too!" (Lewisburg UMC, Lewisburg, WV).

For some persons, the presence of children was related to whether parents had given the children adequate preparation for understanding their actions, and to "distraction" factors for other persons involved in the act of communing at the same table.

The group noted the paradox of an open welcome to "all who repent of your sins, who are in love and charity with your neighbors, and who intend to lead a new life..." and the need for a disciplined response to the Invitation. The group, in recognizing the paradox, supports the generous, open welcome to the Lord's Table. The perplexity remains about children receiving communion who are uninstructed in any of its meaning (and who may come to the altar rail making comments like "What is this?" or "I don't want any", or "I didn't get enough", etc.); and whether the invitation is addressed only to Baptized persons. The general feeling was that there should be no restrictions (e.g. Baptism as a condition of welcome, or age of the recipient); yet the issue is not fully resolved (Bracken UMC, San Antonio, TX).

For others, the presence of children at the Eucharist was related to another on which opinion is divided -- whether baptism is an absolute prerequisite for admission to communion.

"A second question concerned children at the eucharist and the relationship to baptism to eucharist. BEM clearly indicates that all who are baptized (and only those baptized) are welcome at the Lord's Table. These points require further clarification in our own context (Centenary UMC, Mankato, MN).

Others, explicitly or implicitly in the way they spoke of "open communion" and the opportunity to view the eucharist as renewal of baptismal vows, appeared more flexible on both issues. One church offered "Teaching that all baptized have a place at the table... will modify understanding of many about participation of children" (Emmanuel UMC, Polo, IL). For another, either the question remains or "open communion" stands in need of definition: "The area we are not sure of in our class was who should receive. We agree on a open rail, but should there be a requirement of baptism or confirmation" (First UMC, Burlington, VT).

Other issues for which clearer expression should be sought are 1) sacrifice,, 2) the diversity of liturgical practice and 3) the style of preparation for participation in the Eucharist. For example, The Rhode Island study group composed of members of two churches wrote: "Churches should study 'sacrifice' aspects of Eucharist whether or not they have adopted the term 'sacrifice'. (E-8C). This recommendation was unanimously received". Another church called attention to feelings of loss if asked to abandon familiar liturgical practice in order to accomodate the practices of other churches: "The kneeling position at the altar rail method of receiving the Eucharist was noted in a strong, positive way. The group would greatly lament the removal of this form of receiving on a regular basis" (Bracken UMC, San Antonio, TX). and one church said the introduction of wine instead of grape juice would be probably unacceptable" (St. Paul UMC, Dayton, OH).

Preparation for Eucharist was a concern to a church that was considering moving to weekly celebration. This transition was going to be a challenge, it was felt, because of "the logistics of distribution within a large congregation", and also because of the concern over how to "prevent its trivialization or mechanization". In the light of these factors the church said:

Part of this response was given in the context for a fuller preparation for eucharist -- an announced time for individual preparation and reconciliation (Centenary UMC, Mankato, MN).

As we will see, these concerns will impact the way this church -- and others -- will view what will be the effect on the

denomination's thought and practice and what initiatives are taken in local churches in the areas of worship and education.

B. Question 2: The consequences your church can draw from this text

1. The effect on the denominations's thought and practice.

If the consensus on the Eucharist in BEM were taken seriously, most churches felt the impact on current attitudes and worship styles would be considerable. In answer to the question of how the denomination would be affected, one church said "Profoundly! We interpret the import of the document to be stressing the Eucharist at all worship services" (Wesley UMC, Phillipsburg, NJ). Other replies were "We would have to consider placing the Eucharist back in the center of worship (First UMC, Delmar, NY). Eucharist would be seen as "more than a symbol" it would cause us to examine the "why" of Eucharist from the standpoint of our practice"; and it could lead to the "recovery of the heritage of the early church and of our own Wesleyan heritage" (Whiting UMC, Indiana).

2. Relations with churches in the community

The churches saw in Eucharist a way to being about better understanding between churches through fostering more closeness with the liturgical churches. Many churches responding to the study felt that BEM could "eliminate or lower boundaries" between churches, "enhance the appreciation of the emphasis of some of the other churches" in the community, and encourage other churches to share in eucharist fellowship. This would happen most positively where Eucharist was seen as the center of the Churches' worship. However, "It (Eucharist) allows us to see the unity which is there, but since dominant congregations are Roman Catholic and Missouri Synod Lutheran, issues of ministry still divide" (Whiting UMC, Indiana).

C. Question 3: Guidance

1. Ways the statement on Eucharist has been challenging or provocative.

Not surprising in answer to this question, several of the above themes re-emerge. The study "forced us to recognize how non-sacramental (parochial) we are", said one church. Several churches again raised the issues of 1) frequency of communion in the liturgical life of the local church; and 2) conditions or pre-requisites for admission, such as baptism. Churches confessed serious "consciousness-raising" around issues such as eucharistic fellowship ("shared eucharist"), the "mystery" of the Eucharist, the need for a "more sophisticated understanding of the meaning of 'symbol' "the recovery of heritage and the highlighting of Eucharist as Thanksgiving. One church said that approaching Eucharist through themes of

"centrality, solidarity, reconciliation...provoked much discussion and deepened some insights into the scope of the Eucharist" (St. Andrew UMC, Memphis, TN).

2. Changes in the local church (already made or expected)

a. Worship

The study of BEM has already resulted in changes in local churches: one church (Hope UMC, Faribault, MN) has changed to a new order of worship (1972 Alternate Text). And another has called for the sensitive use of historic and trial liturgies (Chehalis UMC, Chehalis WA); and still another church has gone to the practice of using one loaf (St. Paul UMC, Trenton, NJ).

While one church hopes that BEM will "pave the way to the restoration of the Eucharist as the normative service worship" (Red Hill UMC, Parkersburg, WV), others either disagree or are unsure of the "normative" nature of Eucharist for all worship.

A district consultation reported tensions, ascribing those tensions to our history: "We discussed the norm of weekly observance and its popularity and/or unpopularity. We felt the tensions between the 'free church' and Anglican roots from whence we come" (Long Beach District, CA).

The same church that looked forward to the recovery of the normative role of the Eucharist also reflected:

Though we have become more sacramental in recent years, the move to weekly celebration of the Eucharist would be a big move indeed (our present practice is monthly celebration, with additional celebrations on Easter and Christmas (Red Hill UMC, Parkersburg, WV).

And another church in the same state was more frank:

The idea of celebrating the eucharist at every worship service was not received with any enthusiasm. Those present at the discussion thought it would lose its impact if repeated that frequently. Also we would have to revise our Sunday service if we in a large church, had the Eucharist every Sunday (Lewisburg, UMC, Lewisburg, WV).

One church noted that "Questions were raised regarding the church's more frequent participation of communion in light of evidence that indicates a pre-disposition for members of the congregation to be absent from celebrations of the supper" (First UMC, Kane, PA). What all this points to, probably, is the connection between worship and the need for exposure, sensitization, and education.

Besides the logistical problems and "cultural upset" that will attend a transition from infrequent to frequent communion, some churches are concerned about how "normative" the Eucharist is for Christian worship.

One church, which approached its study positively and articulated its findings fully and clearly, struggled with the BEM statement of the Eucharist's centrality (Section 12, I):

Is central "first among others" or must Eucharist be included in every Sunday service? Because of the bountiful gifts of the Holy Spirit, there is no one way to worship God. As one participant stated, "I agree to the centrality of the Eucharist, but I don't want it to become an idol or too exclusively the way". We have similar problems with the statement in Eucharist 14 (II) (8) that "the memorial of Christ in the Eucharist is the basis and source of all Christian prayer". We simply doubt from all the examples of prayer in scripture that this is true" (University Park UMC, Dallas, TX).

Still, this church did conclude that while it would be difficult, the move to more frequent communion should be made. Ways were considered to expose parishioners to increased occasions for Eucharist, both in regular Sunday worship and at special worship celebrations such as weddings.

- (e) Frequency and availability of the Eucharist. There was no groundswell of opinion for Eucharist more frequently than the first Sunday of the month. Interest at most was expressed in the longstanding practice of a larger, neighboring UM congregation which offers a separate Eucharist in its chapel at 9:00 a.m. each Sunday in addition to Eucharist at principal services in the main Sanctuary on the first Sunday. Some felt that further education of the congregation and revision of the liturgy should precede increasing frequency of the Eucharist. While they felt that the Eucharist should be more available to those who want it, others questioned whether the Eucharist should be offered so frequently "that it becomes slick and unthinking, unprayerful rote." Despite all objections, the issue remains of somehow breaking the ancient Reformation pattern of Eucharist only on the first Sunday of the month. Some effort should be made in that direction, whether it be a special chapel service one or more Sundays each month or converting one of the principal services in the sanctuary to a Eucharist on an additional Sunday,

perhaps according to the Alternate Text. Greater participation should be encouraged in our Prayer Group which meets for the Eucharist every Monday morning.

- (g) Other occasions for the Eucharist. A diversity of opportunities for the Eucharist exist in Baptism, wedding, funeral and retreat services. Members should be made aware of the options by the clergy. While they cannot get too far ahead of the congregation, the clergy must take a more active role in promoting the Eucharist. Choice of the Eucharist for Baptism, weddings, and funerals by individuals offers an example to the entire congregation of the relevance of the Eucharist (University Park UMC, Dallas, TX).

As we have seen, there is fear that the Eucharist might lose its meaning or impact if practiced too frequently, especially if it becomes "mechanical or habitual". Some were willing to risk losing the "specialness quality" because of the joy, sharing, and sense of Christ's presence they expect to receive. It was in this spirit that the two-church study group in Scituate and Coventry, Rhode Island, wrote: "Eucharist should take place frequently; that is, every Sunday (E30-E31). Six members support this recommendation; some thought it should be available daily". But finally, BEM study has already produced change in some cases, and churches must begin with "where they are". As one clergywoman wrote proudly,

During the Sunday on Communion, we polled the congregation and found 80% wanted Communion more than three times per year (past practice here). The senior pastor is now committed to monthly communion. We have taken some steps toward the Church Ecumenical! (First UMC, Delmar, NY).

b. Education

Several churches spoke of the need to teach about the Sacraments in church school and confirmation classes and to alert others to see meaning in the diversity of eucharistic practices across the Church. Education is the key to understanding the "sacrament" as more than "symbol" (St Paul UMC, Dayton, OH). Education is key to being able to change liturgical styles in the local church without being threatening. The importance of education for helping local churches see the value in more frequent celebrations of Eucharist has already been noted. Some churches posited the importance of education, including preaching, over against possible "overemphases" on such as "sacrifice" and "sacramentality". Other congregations pointed to the fact that Eucharist is both preaching and sacramental act, or the balance between word and table in BEM.

At least one church saw "preparation" as significant for proper appreciation of the Eucharist. This church (First UMC, Kane, PA) felt that serious preparation would require changes in both worship and education, specifically:

- 1) The development of a preparatory service to be used as a corporate preparation for the celebration of the supper [and]
- 2) Development of a preparation guide for the use of the congregation prior to the celebration of the supper (This would apply also to devotional life and spiritual growth).

(c) Mission and Service

A few churches responded by saying that their study had resulted already in "outreach" on a regular basis to take the Eucharist to shut-ins. One church hoped that the study would open the door to dialogue. Several churches saw a connection between Eucharist and "ethical demand for reconciliation and wholeness" or an "impact on injustice, racism, separation, etc.".

(d) Devotional life and spiritual growth

Several churches wrote of a connection between Eucharist and personal devotions (such as preparation) and "table-meditation". One of the respondents hinted that children or ill-prepared persons, especially children, at the Lord's table tend to be distractive to others involved in "table-meditation". For some the altar is a "special place" and they wanted to continue "hallowing it as such" (Bracken UMC, San Antonio). One church spoke eloquently of the need for more "wonder, awe, and mystery in our spirituality". Another saw the Eucharist as a way to deepen the church's spirituality: "The common things of life can be used as symbols of the spiritual. The world about us can be the instrument by which God comes to us" (Hennepin UMC).

(e) Theological Perspectives

Hoped for changes in heightened awarenesses in the church represent a return in many ways to the statement on how BEM contains the faith of the church through the ages. Some of the themes expressed were: 1) Eucharist as sign of forgiveness and symbol of Christ's life and sacrifice (Wesley UMC, Phillipsburg, New Jersey); 2) Eucharist as the presence of Christ with us today; 3) Eucharist as our gift to God as well as God's gift to us; and 4) the concept of "symbol" and "remembrance". The Eucharist as meal of the kingdom was also helpful in some settings.

Question 4: Suggestions for Faith and Order

"Keep pushing" for more eucharistic fellowship and for a more open communion emerged as suggestions, as well as the advice that Eucharist be emphasized more and be celebrated more often in ecumenical gatherings (Wesley UMC, Phillipsburg, NJ). One church asked that there be made available specific models for shared eucharist. The problem is not that there are no resources. The problem is how to let congregations know about them so that the excitement can grow. One congregation asked for more clarity regarding theological definitions and terms in order to help with the understanding of the meaning and significance of Eucharist in the life of the Church (First UMC, Kane, PA). Another suggested that some articulation of the link between baptism and eucharist as "sacraments of unity" would be helpful. Several churches stressed the need to move away from an individualistic or privatistic understanding of communion [and] instead see Eucharist more as an act of the community (Centenary UMC, Mankato, MN; Chehalis UMC, WA; Hennepin UMC, IL; Whiting UMC, IN).

V. MINISTRY

A. Question 1. The extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages.

1. Ways that churches recognized the Church's faith in BEM

The churches affirmed that they recognized the faith of the Church through the ages in the opening section of BEM where trinitarian language is used to describe the nature and mission of the church (God's call to the whole of humanity, Christ's victory over powers of evil and death, the liberating and renewing power of the Holy Spirit (I. 1-3)). There was general and deeply felt affirmation of the bifocal emphasis in BEM on the calling of the whole people of God and the special tasks of ordained or "set apart" ministry. There was recognition that "God has always called some to special ministries". But there was insistence on the priesthood of all believers and on the importance of being priests to one another in the Body of Christ (Hennepin UMC).

Some respondents were uncomfortable with what they perceived as lack of balance between the ministry of the ordained and the laity in BEM, or an overshadowing of lay ministry by the amount of attention paid to ordained ministries. One church wrote

We were uncomfortable about the minimal emphasis on ministry of the laity. We saw Disciples, etc. taking greater interest and responsibility than most UM's (Emmanuel UMC, Pole, IN).

Another church put it this way:

The only major weakness we found in the section on Ministry was that after the first six paragraphs in which the ministry of the whole people of God was affirmed, the rest of the study focused exclusively on ordained ministry. A fuller discussion and description of lay ministry and how it complements and relates to the ordained ministry might be indicated (Windover Hills UMC, Pittsburgh, PA).

Still another reporter said

The laypeople noted that as many pages were spent on ministry as on the two sacraments together. They felt that this balance did not speak for their interest but pointed to the influence of clergy in the preparation of this document. "There is too much repetition in this section. It could be condensed for the ordinary person to understand better". The initial paragraphs on the calling of the whole people of God were clear and affirmed. The most popular paragraph was thirteen, "the chief responsibility of the ordained ministry is to assemble and build up the body of Christ" (Grace UMC, Dallas, TX).

Another group felt deeply that this issue related to the struggle to involve lay persons creatively in the life of their local church:

The most significant part of this section is the responsibility of the whole people of God for the life of the Church. This has been a particular struggle within our congregation and we need to address it rather directly. We especially sensed the need for the recognition of individual gifts, the need to draw these gifts out, and the need for them to be shared with the community (Centenary UMC, Mankato, MN).

Ministry of the whole church was also on the mind of the church in Texas (Bracken, UMC, San Antonio) which said it "greatly appreciated" this focus, but went on to note

"Phrases in para. 11 about ordained ministry (e.g. heralds, ambassadors of Christ, leaders, teachers) could apply as well to lay ministry; the group suggest clarification here."

The churches generally wished to assert, as one church did, "We are all in ministry; ministry is a way of life as we live our faith" (First UMC, Burlington, VT).

Several churches either enthusiastically affirmed the three-fold ordering of ministry as a reflection of current UM (defacto) practice, as recovery of earlier tradition, or as a timely ecumenical vehicle, and some saw this ordering in relation to the calling of the whole people of God (e.g. St. Paul UMC, Trenton, NJ). The three-fold ordering of ministry was seen by some positively as an option that could help the church move toward greater unity, even though there was little conviction over the necessity of that particular form:

- a. All but one member of the group agreed with the statement in M-19 that, "The New Testament does not describe a single pattern of ministry which might serve as a blueprint or continuing norm for all future ministry in the church". That is, the New Testament does not call for a particular church structure.
- b. Most members of the group hold that the New Testament prescribes functions not struct[ures]. Hence, structure is not part of faith, fulfilling the function is. Hence, the various points on ministerial structures in BEM are neither inside or outside of the faith of the church through the ages (Shepherd of the Valley UMC, Scituate, RI; Washington UMC, Coventry, Rhode Island).

2. Ways the statement might better express the Church's faith

Other churches raised questions, expressed reservations or resisted uniformity as historically unhelpful. One church complained strongly that

The statement exhibits a predisposition by the writers of this section on one Biblical pattern for ministry and does not allow for the investigation and discussion of alternative patterns. In paragraph 19 the observation is made that there are a variety of forms but the document chooses only to talk about a tri-fold understanding of the Church's ordained ministry. The study group felt that the paper used a lot of words to say very little. That too much of what we understand to be ministry is emphasized in the ordained, and to that there is too little emphasis upon all the gifts of ministry that are found present in every church. It is our consensus that too much is left out in a predetermined conclusion of what ministry, in particular ordained ministry, must look like (First UMC, Kane, PA).

This group concluded "The church needs to be guided by the New Testament principle of no uniformity, but unity in ministry".

Another church reflected on the three-fold ordering of ministry in terms of changes that would result in our current understanding of bishop and deacon.

The paper identified several issues surrounding ministry in general and ordained ministry in particular. One was the issue of ordination itself. Additionally, there were the issues of consistent terminology for ordained ministry, mutual recognition across denominational lines, the three-fold pattern of ordained ministry, and the ordination of both women and men. Our group was able to affirm each of these issues as they relate to (ordained) ministry. An issue for the United Methodist Church is whether we are prepared to move toward an actual three-fold pattern of ministry. We have bishops on a permanent basis (though not a separate order) and presbyters (elders), but the third tier (deacons) are not a permanent order within our tradition. We also raised the question of what the advantages would be of moving toward an actual three-fold pattern of ministry. For instance, would there be an advantage to ordaining deaconal ministers to ministries of "service, justice and love", or does the current structure within the United Methodist Church adequately fulfill the three-fold pattern of ministry? (Windover Hills UMC, Pittsburgh, PA).

More will need to be said about the three-fold ordering of ministry and changes in the UM episcopacy and diaconate under the section below on "consequences...effects on the denomination's thought and practice."

One very important point raised strongly in the responses over and over is the issue of the way BEM deals with the ordination of women. Our local church respondents felt that BEM is inadequate.

We saw the issue of women clergy as logical outgrowth of para. 22. If Spirit can work, then certainly women's place is affirmed by experience. Tradition is falsely given too much weight over against the experience of some churches (Emmanuel UMC, Polo, IL).

There was considerable unhappiness among a number of members concerning the failure of BEM to endorse the ordination of women.

There was consternation, concern, and division of opinion in the group over the issue of ordination of women. BEM described how some denominations ordain women while some do not.

BEM did not take a stand on whether women should be ordained. BEM's only recommendation was found in M-54, and said that the ordination of women should not be regarded as a substantive hindrance to mutual recognition of ministry. Seven members, including a Roman Catholic approved this recommendation, while three members opposed it. One Roman Catholic stated that this issue was a very substantive one, whether or not people denied it. The two UMC clergywomen in the group were not happy about recognizing ordained members in denominations which did not recognize their ordinations. BEM's failure to endorse the ordination of women was a major drawback or weakness in the document, according to most members of the group (Shepherd of the Valley UMC, Scituate, RI; Washington UMC, Coventry, RI).

It is clear that the issue of the role of women in the church is not peripheral but central. Laity in local churches want ecclesial engineers to understand that the ordination of women is non-negotiable.

It is also clear from the responses that United Methodists value the "set apart" ministry but take great care to guarantee and enhance the ministry of the whole people of God.

While all are "called" into ministry, one congregation felt that some dimension about the "call" needs to be reinstated in those who are in the ordained ministry, when it urged a "much longer, more exciting description of the place of call in the conditions for ordination" (Grace, UMC, Dallas, TX).

B. Question 2: The consequences your church can draw from this text

1. The effect on the denomination's thought and practice

One congregation, responding to the question about the impact of taking the BEM text on ministry seriously, said that it "would call our whole understanding of ordained ministry into question" (First UMC, Kane, PA): a strong doctrine of the priesthood of all believers raised the basic question, "Why ordain at all?" At the very least, another pointed, it would change the way some Annual conferences now deal with ordained persons who come from other communions and who are made to feel "unordained" (a mixing of the roles of ordination and conference membership?) One church said that serious consideration of BEM would produce "new insights into apostolic succession" (St. Andrew's UMC, Memphis, TN), another called for better education in the local church on the meaning of ministry (First UMC, Jacksonville, TX), and several pointed to changes necessary in the way we presently order ministry in the UMC. For example there was general agreement that the UMC

needs to re-define deacons and the diaconate. While there seemed to be consensus that the diaconate should not be a "stepping-stone" to the presbyterate, the feeling that this re-defined diaconate should be an ordained ministry was not unanimous. (37).

One church went on record as being opposed to the ordination of Deacons.

The three-ordered ministry was generally acknowledged by the group, but there was strong sentiment from several that Deacons not be ordained (for this would confuse persons in the significance of ordination of presbyters/elders/priests, and "ordination" means (to most of the group the setting apart of a person as presbyter/elder/priest. There is appreciation for the office of Deacon as intrinsic to ministry, and not as a step to presbyters/elders/priest orders (unlike current UMC practice) (Bracken UMC, San Antonio, TX).

Many churches urged the renewal of the diaconate and welcomed the ordained, permanent diaconate in the UMC.

The UM Church needs to develop a diaconal ministry -- we liked how the document represented the ministry of deacons and can see that being very helpful in our churches (Hope UMC, Faribault, MN).

...if taken seriously, UMC would ordain as deacons and demand liturgical expression of the various forms deaconal ministry takes in UMC: home missionaries, deaconnes (sic), diaconal ministers, deacons (Whiting UMC, IN).

We believe Deacons in the Methodist Church should not be seen as a movement toward Elders Orders but should be more in line with the early churches diaconal witness (Wesley UMC, Phillipsburg, NJ).

The same kind of ambivalence, but general acceptance, emerged about the ordination of bishops. The church that was so strongly opposed to ordination of deacons also urged the continuation of the consecration rather than the "ordination" of bishops (Bracken UMC, San Antonio, TX).

Other groups were very clear that they felt differently, partly due to the present "de-facto" third-order nature of UM episcopacy:

We felt that the document might encourage the clarification and reform of the Episcopacy in our denomination (Long Beach District Consultation, Pacific-Southwest Conference).

It would require recognition that bishops are a third order and it really is time for us to acknowledge that. In practice, that is how we function already (St. Paul UMC, Trenton, NJ).

However, they came at it, the churches felt that BEM could have far reaching consequences for the denominations thought and practice. One questioned whether it could result in a loss of the diversity so important in our heritage and tradition and lead to a kind of "sameness" or flatness that could be devastating (Chehalis UMC, WA). Another saw exciting possibilities ahead for the denomination: "There would be a reformation within the life of the church" (Windover Hills UMC, Pittsburgh, PA). One church concluded by reflecting on how that local church would react to changes in the denomination's thought and practice in the area of ministry on this hopeful note:

The original reaction to change in ordained ministry would be strong. But we feel church would adjust and maintain ministry in its new church (Wesley UMC, Phillipsburg, NJ).

2. Relations with churches in the community

Relations with other churches in the community would be affected, first of all, by the new level of understanding and acceptance that would result from a study of BEM. On the one hand this has to do with relations between the ordained and lay ministries in every communion: "Awareness of and deeper understanding of the common ground we share both with the ranks of the ordained and the whole Body of Christ" (Windover Hills UMC, Pittsburgh, PA). On the other hand, it has to do with relations between the church and the theological traditions. Various churches expressed this new awareness as: recognition of common orders and heritage, and awareness as: recognition of common orders and heritage, and understanding of "other forms of governance and ministry" (O'Fallon/Williams Memorial, MO), appreciation of diversity, [we] learned "not to assume agreement on issues of church practice" (Epworth UMC, Berkeley, CA), better understanding (after the study) of the Catholic tradition (Red Hill UMC, Parkersburg, WV), and the potential for an easier mutual acceptance of ministries (First UMC, Dover, NJ). There was an occasional warning about the dangers of uniformity (First UMC, Kane, PA), but on the whole the churches saw the Ministry section on BEM leading to further genuine unity. One church even hoped that its study would one day "allow us to lead worship or celebrate the Eucharist in every church" (Wesley UMC, Phillipsburg, NJ).

C. Question 3: Guidance

1. Ways the statement on ministry has been challenging or provocative.

As in the statement on Eucharist, the responses of the churches to this question represent a return to many of the same themes lifted up in the section on recognition of the church's faith. Several churches again emphasized the need for a better understanding, informed by BEM, on the ministry of the laity. One church articulated beautifully what future might lie beyond the BEM challenge:

Like the Discipline, the Statement on Ministry in its primary emphasis on the ministry of all Christians. Challenges clergy and laity to move beyond their understandings of roles to development of true collegiality in ministry (Whiting UMC, IN).

Another area where several churches found BEM helpful was in the definition or "meaning" or ordination. The church claimed that the group that studied BEM came to an understanding of "what was involved in ordination" (First UMC, Pittsburgh, PA). Discussion in another church brought out that ordination is a non-repeatable act (St. Andrews, UMC, Memphis, TN). Still, it was felt that there was a challenge before the church to engage in more theological reflection on the meaning of ordination (First UMC, Stamford, CT) and the same time to move from the theological to the "practical" (e.g. in studying the relationship between ministry and "organization", (First UMC, Kane PA).

2. Changes in the local church (already made or expected)

a. Worship

The churches were in general agreement that renewed emphasis on the ministry of the laity should result in the presence of more lay leadership in the worship on the congregation. For one church this meant more participation by all members in the sacramental life of the church.

In particular, this would mean for that congregation

We hopefully would see the administration of communion as being shared with the lay people of the church (Wesley UMC, Phillipsburg, NJ).

b. Education

The place to start changing attitudes about ministry and especially to cultivate laity for ministry is in the educational life of the church. Several churches saw

ities for possibilities for education about our (and others') traditions and the practice of ministry. One church hoped to educate through exposure to numerous images of orders that are also biblically consistent (First UMC, Jacksonville, TX).

c. Mission and Service

As in the Eucharist section, churches grasped the connection between ministry and the mission and service of the Church. Again, the starting point for this thrust was thought by the churches to be the ministry of the laity. One congregation called for the churches to seek ways to put par. 4 into action, i.e. identify with the joys and suffering of all people and witness to them in caring love. Another congregation had stated that the statement on Ministry had been "provocative" because "The recognition that all Christians are called to ministry is challenging our people to service". When that church was asked about how BEM might change its style of mission and service, it replied

It is hoped that all our people will begin intentionally seeking out and fulfilling their ministries (Red Hill UMC, Parkersburg, WV).

d. Devotional life and spiritual growth

Perhaps because of the more practical approach of the study group, or perhaps because of the focus on mission and service and educational strategies, there was little or no reaction by the churches to this area of the Church's life regarding ministry, unless one reads the increased commitment to lay ministry as one form of spiritual growth.

e. Theological perspectives

Here again, there was a call for a proper balance of emphasis between the lay ministry and the "set apart" ministry (First UMC, Berkeley, CA).

D. Question 4: Suggestions for Faith and Order

Several churches felt more emphasis needs to be put on the nature of individual gifts and the sharing of those gifts in community (e.g. Centenary UMC, Mankato, MN). One church wrote: "If our congregation were to enter into a yoking, federation or merger with another church, BEM would be an excellent theological bases for the new relationship" (St. Andrew UMC, Memphis, TN).

Churches also suggested that Faith and Order provide clarity regarding apostolic succession (First UMC, Kane, PA) with a stronger statement on the priesthood of all believers and push ahead toward the goal of mutual recognition of orders (Red Hill UMC, Parkersburg, WA).

Respondents were aware that this movement toward recognition would mean change, growth, and even painful confrontation. By far the most strongly worded and most numerous suggestions spoke to the issue of women's ordination. One church recommended "that the issue of the ordination of women be discussed more fully in our church and in our Sunday School classes" (Vermont UMC, Quincy, IL). Another church (also in Illinois) asked Faith and Order for

...more guidance on role of laity and women clergy in the Eucharist. One experience-- Roman Catholics agreed on content of this section but balked at participation in a service because of role of a lay woman as one officiant (Emmanual UMC, Polo, IL).

While it is not clear here how the word "officiant" is to be understood, since Roman Catholic lay women now read Scripture and may assist clergy in some liturgical roles, the intent of the request is clear. Another group was even more direct:

A stand should be taken in favor of ordination of women. Also, the word "sex" should be added to the list in M-50 (Shepherd of the Valley UMC Scituate, RI; Washington UMC, Coventry, RI).

VI CONCLUSION

While much of the evaluation of this process is already apparent by the seriousness and affirmation with which these responses have been shared, a few final comments in the words of responders may be important to conclude this report.

One pastor (who probably should not be identified) wrote a two sentence response as follows: "The study was conducted in one of our adult classes. I doubt that it will have any effect on our congregation at all and very little effect if any on the persons who participated in the study". Other lay and clergy leaders expressed quite the opposite. Here are several:

...I have genuinely enjoyed guiding the group and helping them hear the BEM document. As we read the paragraphs and commented on them to get clarity, there was strong and positive interest. As the pastor I found it beneficial to hear these people discuss their deeply-held experiences and Christian faith as it is lived out in the congregational (and larger) setting, and to have such a mature and open conversation about these important matters...My doctoral studies are in liturgical theology, and this is one way that I could share my excitement as a liturgical theologian and hopefully help others to see some of the sources of my spiritual and intellectual life...We appreciate the opportunity to be selected as a responding congregation (Bracken UMC, San Antonio, TX).

...We have never had so much luck in finding churches to study any document as we have with the BEM document. The response has been wonderful (From a Conference Chairperson).

...It would be well if BEM were promoted as a priority study for every congregation.

...This was the initial theological reflection for many in the class (O'Fallon/Williams Memorial UMC, MO).

Overall, this study has increased the sensitivity and understanding of the theological perspectives and practices of other churches in the Christian tradition. "Greater respect and appreciation...has arisen among us because of this study. As BEM continues to be explored by local branches of the member churches of WCC that irenic spirit can only increase" (Chehalis UMC, Washington).

Only one pastor who developed an extensive educational approach to BEM expressed real discouragement. The pastor said that a four sermon series was preached on unity, baptism, eucharist, and ministry, with "an invitational response"

following the sermon (coming forward for prayer or renewal of baptismal vows). While the services and topics were "dynamic", "few folks were interested in talking about these issues. Attendance at the 4 session study course varied from one to eight, and this discouraged me. Few were interested at the depth that I, as clergy, am". However as a consequence of their study, members now celebrate eucharist more frequently and have renewed their baptismal vows on several occasions, including the Easter Vigil Service, using the UM Service of Baptism, Confirmation and Renewal with the use of water. Perhaps there is more reason to be encouraged than the pastor believes!

Several churches felt that BEM deserved more study and would encourage wide study of it in their conferences. Centenary United Methodist Church (Mankato, MN) suggested "There needs to be more of a connection with the local church -- broader dissemination and more distinct efforts to involve large members of lay people. This was a very positive educational experience that we believe needs to be shared throughout the Church". One group felt so strongly that BEM ought to be a priority-study item for every congregation that took a resolution to that effect to the annual conference, where it passed (W. Va).

A number of churches protested the difficult technical theological language, indicating that if the intent is for "local church folk" to study the documents, then that intention should be kept in mind at the outset. The average education for many churches is high school or less.

...it would be helpful if documents could be written with lay persons in mind. We spent a great deal of time just trying to understand what was being said and were not able to spend as much time on the implications of the text for our congregation (Epworth UMC, Berkeley, CA).

"Faith and Order could write its future documents in less cumbersome fashion. A glossary ought to accompany further refinements of BEM, or any other work; this would aid the lay person who wants to be included in the discussion, but often finds these treatises appear to be conversations among professionals, with laity allowed to overhear at their own risk" (Chehalis UMC, Chehalis, WA).

Many churches felt an inordinate amount of space, energy, and technicality was spent on the Ministry section. They indicated that while they appreciated the initial emphasis on the "whole people of God" that set the context for the Ministry section, that from then on, the text focused on those small number of persons who are clergy. The issue, clearly, is that all our ministries -- lay and clergy -- be grounded in God's call to be in ministry in the world and among the people created and loved by God. The theological depth and sensitivity of many of the respondents should make us proud!

appreciation was genuine appreciation was expressed for the grounding in Scripture which the document displayed. For many, that is the way by which "the faith of the Church through the ages" can be attested to.

A number of groups expressed appreciation for the existence of diversity within the Church and some went further to say that "it is almost a point of pride that our (UM) church is open to and flexible with a variety of beliefs... (However, we) were challenged... (as to) whether we would be willing to give up our flexibility for the sake of unity with those who have a more definitive set of beliefs and practices" (Epworth UMC, Berkeley, CA). At least one church tried to show its "flexibility" with this recommendation:

There is a recognition that immersion baptism is not practiced generally in the UMC and that appropriate architectural considerations must be made to provide for this if the UMC is to put this important dimension into regular practice. We would urge that new church construction and remodeling of sanctuaries provide for immersion baptismal settings. The role of water is important, and an appropriate abundance of water should be used in baptism" (Bracken UMC, San Antonio, TX).

In other words, these responses would seem to indicate that flexibility, willingness to grow and openness to change are important for United Methodist. Christian unity is highly prized by people, and risks may be undertaken for the sake of clearly perceived benefits and deeply held theological precepts... Some points however, are "non-negotiable": ministry of the whole people of God, freedom from oppressive uniformity, a sense of being "in mission", the ordination of all persons -- men and women -- who experience God's call.

In conclusion, high hopes came from local churches that BEM will make a significant contribution to the theological, liturgical, evangelical, and ecumenical life of the church in the future.

Worship continues as we remember what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ. If we begin with worship, perhaps "visible unity" may become a necessary by-product of the Christian faith. We know of no better way whereby the ecumenical, universal church can achieve its goals (Hennepin UMC, IL).

We must offer an open door through which the unchurched and persons of different religious traditions can enter and find a structure of religious belief and practice with which they can relate... It does not mean conformity... but a free expression... of the

contribution one can make from previous religious experience. In this context, BEM actively promoted and presented to new members, become their "charter of acceptance", whereby they can receive us as a broadly accepting congregation in the forefront of theological and liturgical revival. In turn, the new members find in BEM the common elements of Christian faith and practice to which they can relate from their earlier background (University Park UCM, Dallas, Texas).

And finally a note of blessing is sounded in one church's urging Faith and Order to continue its task of bringing the insights of BEM before the Churches.

The suggestion that is offered to the work of Faith and Order is that it pray for patience. We found that our brief study raised more questions than it answered. However, we found our study to be very worthwhile. Our understanding of baptism, eucharist, and ministry were enriched. We would remind Faith and Order that love is patient, and that love for Christ and one another is what drives us in our work together (Epworth UMC, Berkely, CA).

ADDENDUM

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ADDENDUM I

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Appended to this document is an unusual resolution (later passed by the West Virginia Annual Conference) which was submitted to the General Commission by the Rev. James Kerr, W. Va. Conference Chairperson of GCCUIC, indicating joint action having been taken by both the United Methodist and the Roman Catholic ecumenical commission in affirming and commending BEM. This is direct response to the intent of BEM, which is to encourage joint action across denominations, if, for each of our communions, "the faith of the church through the ages" can be expressed as "sufficient" and if that be the case, how long can the churches of Jesus Christ remain separate?

RESOLUTION OF WEST VIRGINIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

WHEREAS the World Council of Churches has presented to the churches of the Christian Faith the document, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, for study and response, and

WHEREAS the highest officials of our church bodies are not studying the document and preparing an appropriate response to the World Council of Churches in 1985, and

WHEREAS the church bodies at all levels of structure are asked to study the document and make response to our particular officials who will be making a response on our behalf,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we who are members of the Roman Catholic Church Commission on Religious Unity of the Wheeling-Charleston Diocese and The United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns of West Virginia Annual Conference meeting in joint session in the St. Joseph's Seminary of Vienna, West Virginia on March 19, 1984 do hereby

1. Express our general agreement with and acceptance of this document, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,
2. Commend it to our highest officials who will be making the appropriate response to the World Council of Churches asking them to respond favorably for us, and
3. Present it to our pastors and local congregations in the Diocese and Annual Conference for their study and understanding, encouraging their favorable reception of this new document.

ADDENDUM II

The Shepherd of the Valley UMC and Washington UMC (of Scituate and Coventry, Rhode Island respectively) presented and extensive comparison of BEM with In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting of the Consultation on Church Union. These churches

had been deeply involved in the study and response to In Quest, and therefore, on their own, proceeded to make their comparisons.

This study group responded to the question regarding the consequences that can be drawn from the text for relations and dialogue with other churches by describing the impact they believe that BEM will have on COCU.

Overall, they believe that in certain areas such as the ordination of women, sexism, racism, institutionalism, and congregational exclusivism, In Quest deals with them "to a considerably more advanced degree than BEM". They believe that the reason for this is that BEM is "heavy" on tradition, in contrast to reform.

The following is a summary of their responses to this question 2:

1. BEM even if there are broad and deep areas of agreement with COCU's document, In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting ("Quest"), might not promote the COCU enterprise. A big obstacle for COCU has been, not theological disagreements, but feelings about institutionalism, hierarchies, "superchurch", and denomination identity.
 2. BEM will have minimal impact on the CCOCU movement if no effort is made to widely publicize and market the content and significance of BEM and QUEST.
 3. BEM seems to be slightly more clearly worded than QUEST.
 4. There are several areas in which BEM and QUEST are similar, i.e.,
 - a. The ministry of lay people is important.
 - b. The Ministry should have a three-fold structure: Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons. The general descriptions of the functions of each are similar in BEM and QUEST.
 - c. Both infant and believers Baptism are valuable.
 - d. The brokenness of the Body of Christ (the whole Church) is decried.
 5. There are several areas in which BEM is more advanced or more detailed than QUEST i.e.:
 - a. The theological and personal meanings of Baptism.
 - b. The theological and personal meanings of Eucharist.
- NOTE: The next edition of QUEST, or its successor document, might beneficially incorporate this material.

6. There are areas in QUEST which are more advanced or more detailed than BEM.

- a. All COCU participating denominations ordain women: QUEST affirms this practice and states that women should serve in any church office.
- b. The issue of racism is discussed forthrightly in QUEST.
- c. All COCU participating denominations have agreed that apostolic succession issues would not be a barrier to church union.
- d. QUEST grapples with the issue of institutionalism (local churches and their members losing control, prerogatives, identity; being "swallowed up" in a bureaucracy or hierarchy). BEM does not deal with this at all. Many national societies around the world are non-democratic; many people from those societies would not understand American aversion to their political/secular and church lives being controlled from the top.
- e. QUEST grapples with the problem of exclusiveness and parochialism among local church members.
- f. QUEST has a fuller treatment of the subject of Scripture vs. Tradition.
- g. QUEST has a more detailed description of the functions of a Presbyter.

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